

OH-6A

Box #1

Brigham Young University – Hawaii
Oral History Program

Lester & Mihi Harris

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY-HAWAII
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INTERVIEWER: Kenneth Baldrige
SUBJECT(S): Maori Agricultural College

Side A

INT This is Ken Baldrige; today is December 27, 1971. I am in Auckland, [New Zealand] visiting Brother and Sister Lester Harris. [I am] talking to Brother [Harris] about the years at the Maori Agricultural College. Now, you went to the College in 1926?

LH In the years of 1926 and 1927.

INT You were there for two years? Where were you living at the time?

LH I was living at a little village called Te Hauke; about fifteen miles away from the MAC, and I was there for the two years as a student.

INT Were you a member of the Church at the time?

LH Oh yes, I was always a member of the Church. I was born to a family of the Church in a little place called Tahoraiti in Dannevirke. I was adopted by my uncle, Takurei Ihaia. I came to live in Hastings—fairly close to the College grounds in Hastings.

INT Now, when you went to the College, did you go to the College from Te Hauke, or from this other place that was right near the grounds?

LH No, I went from Te Hauke to the college.

INT Now, since you were in the Church, I suppose it was regarded as almost natural that you go there?

LH Oh, yes, certainly. It was the wish of my foster parents that I must go to the Church College [MAC].

INT Now, how did you go up there? Did you travel up on the train?

LH No, we boarded at the College.

INT I mean when you first went to the College from Te Hauke.

LH No, we went by car. We had an old Minerva in those day [s].

INT How old were you when you went to the College? [In] 1926?

LH I was about fifteen when I went to the College.

INT Did you start high school there at the College? Third form?

LH Yes.

INT So you were there for your third form and fourth form. Who was the headmaster that you can remember at that time? Was that Sharpe? Was he there then? I can't recall either. I have so many names running through my head, I can't remember.

LH Who (to his wife, Mihi) was our first teacher there?

INT Well, that's okay. President Ballif came later. He wasn't there during your time though, was he? I can't recall whether he went as a teacher and then came back as a headmaster, or what. I don't remember. He was there later, he was there about 1930, I think as the principal.

LH That's right.

INT Now, what were some of the work programs you were involved in? I know they had quite a list of activities, or did you move around in the dairy one week, in the kitchen another week, this type of thing?

LH Yes, that was a common thing at the College; we had to be available for all kinds of different chores at the College, washing dishes, milking cows, farm work, and everything else. Of course, we were past masters at making our beds every morning. It was a requirement. It was stipulated that we are judged by how our beds were made each morning, you know. It was quite a thing for the boys to compete each keeping their rooms up spic and span, sort of.

INT You had room competition then? I remember someone saying something about banners or something like that?

LH That's right.

INT Who were your roommates, do you remember?

LH Charlie Wolfgram, at one time.

INT Were there two or three in a room?

LH There were two in a room if I remember right.

INT Yes, sometimes there were three in a room. I don't know if it was just some rooms. Now, at the time you were there, did they still have the primary program, [with] primary boys?

LH No, not that age.

INT Initially there were some primary children attending there, but I think this had

been discontinued by the time you got there. What were some of the activities you were engaged in? Did you play rugby?

LH Rugby - I started off, of course in the third grade, and the junior. I made the senior team, but I was never brilliant at football. Never was like George Nepia or Lui Paewai or anyone like that [chuckles].

INT Yes, anyone like that would be hard to follow. Did you get to play tennis, basketball, or anything like that?

LH Yes, I loved tennis. That was my game. Basketball-I liked it.

INT Now, was there tennis competition with other schools like there was in rugby?

LH Yes, at the College.

INT So you played Te Aute, Hastings, and others?

LH No, we just played amongst ourselves.

INT Oh, I see. Then it was just [an] intramural competition type of thing. What about basketball?

LH Yes, we had basketball team, but I was never a great basketball player.

INT How about music; were you involved in the music programs that they had?

LH Well, I belonged to the glee club.

INT Was that the choir?

LH We called it a glee club at the College, at that time. That's the only time I've ever heard that or called that.

INT In 1926-27, were there quite a few non-Maori students there? Islanders?

LH Yes, quite a number of islanders. There's Charlie Wolfgram, Lala Leti and Charlie Sanft.

INT Yes, there were several in the picture there. Were there any Europeans there during your period?

LH Yes, there were the Goings. Cyril Going was there, I remember.

INT What would you regard as being the greatest thing that you gained? Do you feel that the academic training that you received at MAC prepared you for the adult-

life in New Zealand?

LH It certainly did academically. I probably couldn't have risen to any great height, but the training received at the Church College, I think, is a great thing in my life as far as the Church is concerned.

INT Did you go on to another school after you left MAC, after you finished third and fourth forms?

LH No, not really.

INT That's the finish then. So whatever academic training you've had, that is, as far as former schooling, took place at MAC? Now, what vocation did you follow in later life?

MH Back on the farm.

INT Back on the farm? All right. This happened to an awful lot. Did the farm training that you got at MAC help out or was this something that you kind of grew up with and knew already?

LH Well, I was brought up on the farm. When my people died, naturally I got the farm as my inheritance. What I learned at the College helped me a lot on the farm.

INT Did you take the classes there? Animal Husbandry and plowing and all this sort of thing that they seemed to have offered there?

LH Yes.

INT So you feel then that you did vocationally and academically, how about spiritually?

LH Well, spiritually--what I am today--I owe to the training I received at the College from the teachers. I am sure that the testimony I have of the Gospel was born at the College. Of course, my people taught me a lot of the Gospel principles before I went to the College. But being at the College, I intermingled with the other students, and my testimony of the Gospel grew from that time on.

INT Wonderful.

LH I would like to mention the fact that I met my future companion and wife-to-be at the MAC, in the person of Mihi Christy from Nuhaka, daughter of Sidney and Kate Christy.

INT So you're Bill's sister then, and Barn's [Barney or Epanaia Christy]? That's right,

your father was born in the United States; you were too, weren't you?

MH No, I was born there; my dad's [Undecipherable]. My great-grandparents went over there, and they joined the Church, and wanted to go to the temple. They went over to the States, and they took my dad, Sid Christy; their nephew, Walter Smith; Hiri Whaanga's sister-in-law, and a few others with them.

INT This about you being a student at MAC. That's most interesting, quite unusual, too. How about telling me about that?

MH Well, I am a year older than Lester. I was there a year before he went to school.

INT This would have been 1925.

MH Leo B. Sharp was the principal. His wife was expecting a baby and needed help, and the arrangement was made that I go and help her and continue on my schooling at MAC. As far as my knowledge goes, I was the only girl-student MAC ever had, and a very spoiled one, too [laughter].

INT So you went to classes right along with boys, did you?

MH Yes.

INT So you would have been in third or fourth [form]. How long were you there?

MH Two years.

INT Third and fourth forms?

MH Yes.

INT Well, that is something. Now, you say you were spoiled, by whom? Everybody?

MH Well, yes. I was spoiled by the boys, the students, and by the teachers. And I feel that I was spoiled because I was on a different status to all the other girls about the place. I knew everybody there and had the advantage over all the other girls. Of course, you must remember that MAC was situated very close to a village. When they would have functions, the school boys were allowed to go to the pa and vice versa. Well, I had the advantage of knowing them all.

INT Well, you had quite an advantage. Then, you met there [Lester]. Did you go together while you were there?

MH No, I knew Lester was related to me, and I didn't have any special boyfriend. I had the whole school. So you see, I didn't have any special boyfriend.

INT Now, Lester, at this time, did you kind of have your eye on her as a possible romantic interest, or was she just a spoiled girl that looked after Sister Sharpe?

LH I think all the boys had their eyes on her [laughter]. Everybody knew she was Sid Christy's daughter and had been to the States or was born over in the States, and she was a real attraction for the boys at the College.

INT That made it a little different right there. Did you participate in any of the functions? Did you have any special role in dramatic activities?

MH I was just going to say, yes; I was pretty good in dramatics.

INT I guess there wasn't any question about who got the female lead [laughter].

MH Well, they did use the teachers' wives and their children, but I particularly liked dramatics. I feel that I learned a great deal there which helped me a lot later--in helping ones in my little village. When I went home, we would have school concerts, Church concerts, and things like that. In that line, because I hadn't the voice to sing, and so I feel that I developed a great deal in dramatics.

LH I would like to mention that she won. . .[interruption].

MH The MIA of the mission would have competitions in different items, [I'm sure you know this], that *huitau*. which are equivalent to stake conference, and two years in succession. I came first place, and then second place and then I won again. That went right into my married life then, over that period of time.

INT Now, do you feel that this success could largely be traced to your MAC experience?

MH It's the only school that I did go to.

INT Now, as the only female student in the class, you feel that you were kind of spoiled in class, or was your school work expected to be up to the same standard as the boys?

MH My school work was expected to be up to the same standard.

INT So, in class you were just another student?

MH That's right.

INT So your spoiling was kind of after hours.

MH That's right.

INT Now, Sister Sharpe had her baby while you were there, and then you helped her with the baby. Were you able to carry a full load of classes while you were there?

MH Yes, I did. It was before I went to school and after I came home.

INT So you came there from Nuhaka? Now, how did you happen to be the one that was brought in for that position?

MH Well, as I've mentioned, my father, after living for so many years in America, knew practically every mission president that came out here. He went to school with them. Because they knew Sid, when they'd visit, [some] recommended that I go to help Sister Sharpe. I was more or less one of their own--let's put it that way--because my upbringing and everything was American, and it wasn't too strange to Sister Sharpe.

INT Yes. That would be comforting to a woman at that particular time, I'm sure. After you both left the College, how long was it after that that you got together again and got married.

MH It was 1932.

INT So it would be roughly about five years, after Lester left the college? Well, I think that's very interesting. You say that this is the only secondary schooling you had?

MH I did go to the village school in Nuhaka when we came from America. But when I went to take care of Sister Sharpe I was sixteen years old. I didn't go to any other school. When I left Sister Sharpe, my own mother needed me because she wasn't a very well person.

INT And you felt the spiritual training you received there was to sustain you?

MH Oh yes, definitely so.

INT Your evaluation of the impact--you indicated a while ago that you felt it was comparable to the labor mission program in succeeding years.

MH Well, you meet an old MAC student; the reactions that those people get is the same as we get--as old labor missionaries. It doesn't matter where you see them, that love and that feeling for that person is so terrific that it's comparable to the same feeling that we had at the MAC.

There's another thing I'd like to mention on this. We'd go to town on a white-top buggy. The football team would all be seated on either the wagon or this white-top, but more often than not, the student body would go on the white-top and the football team on the wagon. And it was something to ride on that white-top.

INT Kind of like the old covered wagons, that sort of thing?

MH Yes, it was something.

INT So the whole student body would go along to the student athletic functions, not just the team?

MH Yes.

INT Now, you would have been there when Rupert Wihongi was there?

MH Yes.

INT He was telling us some of his experiences as yell master. And then Brother [Heteraka] Anaru commented he felt that this had quite an effect on the football players; they'd hear the students cheering.

MH Oliver Ah Mu was at school. There's a boy over at Tahiti, Tamauta Mapuhi, he's still alive.

INT He's in Hawaii now, by the way.

MH Is he really? He was a real heart-throb when he was at school. With his looks, his music, and his football; he was somebody.

INT Now, if you were to think back and both of you might think about this, perhaps the one outstanding event that you remember from your two years at MAC, what would it be?

MH May I say it for Lester? His would be the earthquake.

INT Oh, you were there in 1931? I didn't realize you were there that long; I thought you were just there only two years.

MH Oh, I'm sorry, that's right.

INT What would you think it would be?

LH The highlight to me of my college years has taught me the principles of the Gospel, and the activities in the MIA.

INT Did they operate a proper MIA sort of program while you were there? What would you regard your outstanding experience there, Sister Harris?

MH It might sound funny, but the whole period seemed just to be one big highlight.

Everything I know that I have been able to utilize as a wife and a mother. I learned from all the sisters at the school-to cook, to sew; everything that I do know, I learned there at the school. And it just seemed-maybe it was--the time I lived there, heaven knows, but it seemed so exciting just to learn how to make a batch of fudge which today is just nothing. And the highlight, of course, at the end of every year was a great big dance that they would have. That was something that, for miles around, people looked forward to. Miles around; it wasn't confined to just the school. People all around would come there to the break-up of the school at MAC.

INT Now, were these non-Mormons as well as Mormons?

MH Yes.

INT That's interesting. Is there anything else that you can think of that we might put in there?

LH Well, I would say that what we are today is the result of our life at the College, which was known at that time as Maori Agricultural College; membership at the College, and to be with the American teachers who came from the States to teach us the principles of the Gospel.

INT Okay. Well, thank you very much. We'll close [this] time.

END OF INTERVIEW